

## *A Very Dead Whale*

---

Far off in the mountains of Chukcha there lived an old man of the ripe age of ninety three, named John. A simple village storyteller, proclaimed his friends and children (for his parents were long gone) but he hadn't always been this way. Long ago, when John's muscles were still well defined, and the gleam of adventure was still present, he had lived for glory. Sailing the seven seas, as an independent whaler, he came across the Cove of Fog, late one afternoon, and explored. This specific adventure he told about more than all his others.

"It was a magnificent day for sailing," he began in a gravelly voice, emphasizing "magnificent". The village children crowded round, body's taunt and ears poised to hear an old salt's blemished tale. "A light salty breeze filled the starched white sails of our little whaling ship as we skimmed the turquoise waters. In no time at all we had rounded the Cape of Pigeons, an extent of rock jutting out into the sea utterly soaked in pigeon poop, and sighted what years before, I and my crew had dreamt of. The Cove of Fog. Renowned for its mystery, every whaler before and since who entered it has never come out. Except one. Whales were almost certainly scarce, but it was the mystery that drew us in, an almost tangible thing. The cove was, contrary to its name, the sunniest place I ever saw. In less than a minute, the crew and I got the best suntan and sunburn ever, as well as pooped our pants. Rising from the water, came a hulking beast. In seconds, the sky grew dark enough to light a candle and see for miles. Then, descended a fog so dense you couldn't see through it and the waves grew so tall they seemed to be trying to reach the stars and the sun became a thing of the distant past. The wind howled so loud my eardrums burst twice...and then the whale rose. From up above in the rigging the sailors cried, but the wind carried their screams far away. I saw its eyes first. They bore deep into my soul as the beast rose up up up and stared at us. Just stared. The creature was not skin, but bone, all bone except for its horrible red pupils which I still have nightmares of to this day.

This went on for perhaps thirty seconds before the great beast dipped back into the now-pearl-colored waters. Then the horns began their soulful tune. From far behind the whale, far off at what I imagined was the shore, there was a great trumpeting. A single note, blown in unison by the ten-or-so trumpeters, hung in the air as all became still. Then a single trumpet blew one, long, and deep note. "Ooowwwwowooohhh"

As if by commanded, a single whale, like the bone whale but smaller, rose to the surface. Then another trumpet and another whale. Then another and another, and another. Very soon, at least twenty whales bobbed up and down in the waves. My head, at that very moment, turned to give the order to ready the harpoons, and when I turned back, there was something atop the whales. A dark shadow, a silhouette, rose, and lifted something. I couldn't quite see what was happening, but a sailor up in the crows nest could.

“Captain” he cried out to me “it's a human!”

“It’s a what?” I responded, caught off guard and not quite hearing properly. “A human?”

“Yes, a human!” The exasperated sailor pointed. “See? There it is!”

And out from the darkness came pure horror. Men and women atop whales screamed bloody murder and spurred their stead’s into action. Swords and cutlasses, like our own, rose up in unison, and their war cry flew at us. “Cacccalllllakakkkakakakak!”

Upon reflection, the sound was not scary in the least, but given the setting, I truly believed I would hear that cry inside my nightmares. And then I knew I would, for rising from the depths was the huge bone whale we had seen first. Atop the behemoth was a young man dressed in animal skins and bone jewelry. In one hand he held a cutlass, dried blood caking it, and in the other, an unlit torch. He sheathed the weapon into a scabbard at his side. Then, from his belt he drew a small object, and there came a clicking sound. Suddenly a flame appeared from the contraption, and the man lit his torch. Then he screamed “CHARGGEEEE!” And all the whalers headed his call.

We turned and ran out of that cove like the devil was chasing us. Quickly, we tacked the boat around, and made for the sea. Fortunately, our zig zagging confused the whales and we let loose some harpoons, lines severed. None hit their target, but they sure scared the whalers who ended the chase. We, too frightened to know what we were doing, headed home.”

“And that is my tale” finished John, standing up. “A young whaler long ago, and an old man now. My, how times change.” “Did all that really happen?” wondered a little girl in a small brown dress.

The old whaler smiled a smile that spoke of many things, old and past, and he laughed. A great rumbling laugh, his body trembling. The little girl buried her face in her dress and started to sob. Upon realizing his mistake, John explained to her what he meant by his laugh.

“ Oh, little girl, I'm not laughing at you!” Reassured the storyteller. “I’m laughing at your question!”

“But isn’t that like laughing at me since I asked the question?” Wondered the girl.

“Oh no, not at all! I'm laughing because so many children like you have asked a question like yours so many times!” A smile played across John’s face.

“So you're not laughing at me?” Asked the child.

“No, I’m not laughing at you,” said John. “Not at all.”

